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There Is Nothing Inevitable About Progress in Keeping This Disease Under Control

"It requires constant vigilance. And it requires everyone to continue putting the virus under pressure."

Address by Micheál Martin, Taoiseach, Ireland

Delivered via television, August 7, 2020

To view this week's Speech of the Week on our website, [click here.](#)

No part of our society was untouched as we entered a period of huge uncertainty, worry and vulnerability.

Through the incredible work of our frontline workers and the shared commitment of the Irish people we stopped the rapid spread of the virus. We flattened the curve.

As a society and as individuals we have accepted restrictions which we would never even consider in normal times.

These restrictions have themselves had a profound impact on our social, economic, cultural and personal lives.

But no one should doubt for a single moment that they have been justified or lose sight of how devastating this virus can be.

2,324 men and women on our island have so far lost their lives and many more are still recovering.

And this would have been much, much worse without the restrictions which we have all accepted, and the sacrifices that we have all made since March.

I understand the increasing impatience which many people are feeling.

There is a huge desire to get back to normal life. To celebrate with our loved ones. To meet and properly interact with new people.

To really participate in and enjoy our culture. To travel.

However we all need to understand that this virus is still a deep and urgent threat. It is merciless. And it is unrelenting.

While we have succeeded in reopening significant parts of our society, this process of reopening is not simple. It won't be a case of just moving forward step by step.

Like every other country, we will have setbacks. Every day we watch and read about new examples of countries and regions which thought they had defeated the virus but which are now dealing with new outbreaks.

We have now seen an increase in cases in our own country. We are still doing very well by international standards, but over the past week there have been a number of localised clusters which are a serious concern.

I want to be very clear this evening in reaffirming that the Government is determined to do everything possible to prevent a return to the widespread transmission of the virus.

But the Government cannot do it alone. Each and every one of us, as equal citizens, face an equal threat and hold an equal responsibility to do our best to continue to help limit the spread.

We have more information now than we did at the start of this pandemic. We now know how Covid-19 attacks by stealth and we know how fast it moves.

So, we have to be decisive. We can't afford to "wait and see" – the disease is not waiting.

We must protect public health to the greatest extent possible.

Everything else is secondary to that, and if this requires difficult decisions then so be it.

We have already postponed key parts of the reopening plan and this evening, in response to the increased spread of the disease in counties Kildare, Laois and Offaly, and acting on the very clear advice of public health officials, the Government has decided to introduce a number of limited restrictions within those three counties for a period of two weeks, from midnight tonight.

In these three counties, everyone should restrict their movements to within their own county except for the purposes of work and for other essential journeys.

Those who can work from home should do so, and we are asking employers to facilitate their employees in every way possible, for these two weeks, to do that.

Restaurants and pubs serving food should close except for takeaway services, deliveries and limited outdoor dining.

Discretionary indoor recreation and entertainment venues such as cinemas, theatres, museums, galleries, bingo halls and other indoor recreational, sports, dance and cultural outlets will be closed.

Visitations to prisons, acute hospitals and nursing homes in these areas will be suspended except on compassionate grounds.

Retail can remain open but with strict adherence to public health guidance including the wearing of facemasks.

Childcare and schools that are open can remain open and the preparations for school re-opening will continue.

Outdoor amenities including playgrounds can remain open, again with appropriate social distancing advice.

Households in these counties are asked to restrict visitors to their homes to no more than six people from no more than three households.

Outdoor gatherings should be limited to 15 for organised activities. Non-contact sport training can take place outdoors in groups no larger than 15. Contact sports should cease for the next fortnight, except for training for professional and elite athletes.

People will be able to travel through these counties en route to other destinations in the normal way.

Testing remains a key weapon in our armoury. That is why Government, working with employers and employee representatives have also moved to ramp up testing in affected sectors within the region.

Any business premise that requires to be closed on public health grounds will be closed. And will not reopen until public health officials are satisfied that it no longer poses a threat.

Full details of the list of restrictions are available on Gov.ie

We know that we could go further in terms of restrictions, but we are conscious that as we move forward through this pandemic our responses need to be more nuanced and more sustainable. We also believe that the vast majority of people understand that we are in this together and they will do as they are asked.

I am also asking everyone else in the country to do two things.

Firstly, do not travel to these counties unless for the purposes of work or essential care for a relative.

Secondly, please pause and reflect on what else you can do, what your friends and family can do, and what your colleagues can do, to slow the spread of this disease. The simple rules are the most effective:

- Wash your hands.
- Observe good cough and sneeze etiquette.
- Limit your social interactions.
- Wear face coverings, on public transport, in shops and shopping centres, and in all indoor settings where social distancing is difficult
- Maintain social distancing.
- Support those businesses that are adhering to the public health advice and steer clear of those who are not.
- Know the symptoms and contact your GP if you have even the slightest concern

While the burden of this evening's decision falls heaviest on our people in Kildare, Laois and Offaly, the message needs to be heard and understood by everyone across the country.

There is nothing inevitable about progress in keeping this disease under control.

It requires constant vigilance. And it requires everyone to continue putting the virus under pressure.

Success in this effort will achieve two important objectives:

- We will ensure that our children and young people can return to school as normal. It is essential for their own development and it is essential for our society
- We will also ensure that those parts of our economy that are open, can stay open

Some 35 years ago John Hume, whose passing we all mourned this week, campaigned under the slogan 'Solidarity is Strength'.

That spirit has perhaps never been more important than today. We are all responsible for each other.

By acting responsibly and following the advice, each of us will protect all of us.

Le Céile.

Go raibh maith agaibh.

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